

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) Tuesday night, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Department of Agriculture Appropriations Bill containing an amendment offered on the floor by Congressman Tim Ryan (D-Ohio). Ryan's amendment provides expanded opportunities for communities to comment on potential closures of Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices.

Ryan offered the amendment due to concerns about what is currently taking place in Ohio and other states.

A recent proposal by the Ohio State Farm Service Agency proposed closing and relocating local FSA offices in Trumbull and Portage Counties to Ashtabula and Stark, respectively. Congressman Ryan contacted the Ohio FSA state office to express his concerns about the potential closures and encouraged the Ohio FSA office to seek input from local farmers that would be affected.

"The bottom line is that we need to have complete information about the needs of family farmers and ranchers before Congress or the Department make radical decisions about FSA Personnel levels," Congressman Ryan said. "This process should start at the county committees and involve an office-by-office and regional analysis. Only then can our State FSA offices and the USDA make the best decisions on office closures and relocations. My amendment will help ensure that everyone's voice is heard early enough in the process."

Under current law, communities protesting plans for closure and relocation of local FSA offices may only offer public comment after the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture approves the proposal of a State Farm Service Agency. Ryan's amendment will allow for a public hearing to take place no later than 30 days before the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture approves a state's request for closure.